

# PGP Partnership Day: 1 John

## 1. Introduction: the tricky task of preaching 1 John

**Discussion:** *What makes / might make preaching 1 John difficult?*

- a. Structure, or lack thereof
- b. Situationally remoteness

Something about docetic legalistic perfectionist antinomian gnostics

- c. A clear purpose...

1 John 5:13

... that the book itself seems to subvert!

‘No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.’

‘By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.’

And yet...

- a. 1 John 4
- b. Propitiation
- c. The bit Cranmer cottoned onto

d. And it's all so John

***So how are we going to make headway on 1 John?***

## 2. My 1 John Odyssey / An Essay on the Sources

a. How I got going: a 'church camp' in Singapore

b. What I used

- Some old St Helen's sermons on 1 John
- Andy Gemmill's introduction to 1 John at Inner London Gospel Partnership – typically insightful
  - Vicariously, Matthew Jensen
- Pillar Commentary (Colin Kruse) - very sensible
- Baker Exegetical Commentary (Robert Yarborough) - not very illuminating
- Peter Leithart's Commentary – typically illuminating, typically maverick

c. Getting off on the wrong foot

- Structure (seriously the wrong foot)
- Situation
- Purpose (one or two degrees off course)

*So, the plan for (most of?) the morning: to get back onto the right foot, especially on those three fronts. We'll begin with...*

## 3. Revisiting Purpose

a. We all know the purpose of 1 John

1 John 5:13: 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.'

b. So *why* doesn't it feel like that's what the book is doing as we read it?

i. Option 1: We've got the purpose wrong, 1 John 5:13 notwithstanding

ii. Option 2: We haven't quite understood how John achieves it

c. Exploring the first option: are we quite sure we've got the purpose right?

**Groupwork:**

*This is going to be fairly snappy – give yourself about 30 seconds per verse. There are actually 12 'I write' verses in 1 John. Look them up. Do they overturn 1 John 5:13 as a summary of John's purpose? Do they fill it out at all? BONUS QUESTION: did you notice anything curious about the grammar of those 12 verses?*

1 John 2:1	1 John 2:13c
1 John 2:7	1 John 2:14a
1 John 2:8	1 John 2:14b
1 John 2:12	1 John 2:21
1 John 2:13a	1 John 2:26
1 John 2:13b	1 John 5:13

- i. A general reflection: 1 John 5:13 is a pretty \_\_\_\_\_ summary of the purpose
- ii. An observation: are we quite sure John is casually / cyclically / round-about-ily written?

So if we've got the purpose right, why doesn't it feel like 1 John does it?

d. Exploring further: what do we mean by assurance?

- i. A working assumption: JC Ryle and the 3 tests
  - The Christian lacking assurance
  - Three sources of reassurance
    - Doctrine
    - Obedience
    - Love

*Which sounds good, but...*

- ii. A working assumption we instantly have to moderate
  - '3 tests to ask other Christians about, rather than yourself'

Yes...

... but that isn't quite what 1 John 5:13 says, is it?

- '3 tests every Christian passes'

True ...

... But if everyone passes, then how do they actually reassure the person who needs reassurance?

... And if you get every Christian to pass by sufficiently lowering the standards, how do they reassure?

- 'An exam certificate, rather than a test'

Yes...

**1 John 2:12-14**

... But how does it help me to receive *someone else's* exam certificate

iii. Refining Ryle?

1. *Corporate first: a whole church, not a lone doubter*

2. *The anti-Christ's*

'I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you'<sup>1</sup>

e. Drawing things together

1. John's purpose is that his readers *as a group* might know that they have eternal life – ie that that they might know that they know the living God
2. John's purpose is that his readers as a group might know that they have eternal life, that they know the living God, *in the face of unsettling claims of a rival group*

*And* the great thing about 1 and 2 is that if we can make a bit more progress on what makes John's readers a group, and what makes the anti-Christ's a counter-group, their exam certificate might apply to us!

*What else can we say about the anti-Christ's?*

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<sup>1</sup> This is where Colin Kruse's short commentary is really excellent.

## 4. Revisiting the Situation: Introducing the antichrists

### **Groupwork:**

*Although there are a number of passages in 1 John that we might like to mirror read to infer information about the antichrists, there are really two key passages that describe them: 1 John 2:18-27 (or 2:15-27) and 1 John 4:1-6. Look over these passages.*

- *What do we definitely know about the anti-Christ's from these passages?*
- *BONUS QUESTION: In what ways are the 2 passages similar to each other?*

### a. Introducing the anti-Christ's

1 John 2:19

1 John 2:22-3

1 John 4:2-3

1 John 4:5

1 John 4:6

### b. Docetic-gnostic perfectionist legalistic antinomians? Or **Judaizers**?

- You might forgivably think that Judaizers are not much less remote from your congregation than docetic-gnostic perfectionist legalist antinomians with super-spiritual tendencies...
- ... but we do at least know something about them!
- ... and it plugs us right back into John
- And** it explains something significant about John's style

### c. The Antichrists and the sucker-punch Tool<sup>2</sup>

- A. A statement 'we' (ie John the Christian and the Judaizing antichrists) can all agree with**

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<sup>2</sup> OK, that's not quite what I mean. You can tell me what I do mean if you can think of a better way to say it!

e.g. 'This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.'

**B. An unpacking of that statement that is designed to take down the antichrists**

e.g. 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

*But crucially, John is **not** lowering the bar*

**Groupwork**

*Here are 4 other places where I think John uses the 'sucker punch' tool. Read them and see if you can work out how John moves from something that his Judaizing opponents would happily nod along to to an explanation of that truth that shows them up for what they are. (The last one is hard, and notoriously so – you might prefer to focus on the others).*

*1 John 2:3-11*

*1 John 2:15-22*

*1 John 4:1-6*

*1 John 3:4-10*

<b>A – Something we can all agree on</b>	<b>B – An exposition of that thing that leaves the antichrists high and dry</b>
<i>Those who know God should obey his commandment</i>	<i>The most important commandment is to love the brotherhood, and not stumble them... which is what you aren't doing!</i>
<i>The world is bad – we should hate it</i>	<i>Antichrists are from the world</i>
<i>We don't like false prophets who lead people away from the one true God (Deuteronomy!)</i>	<i>Anyone who doesn't confess Jesus is a false prophet</i>
<i>Doing 'sin' is bad, and doing 'righteousness' is good</i>	<b>The sin is lawless rebellion against the Christ; believing in Jesus is righteousness<sup>3</sup></b>

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<sup>3</sup> Colin Kruse was wonderfully helpful at this point.

Not **lowering** the bar, but showing that we're the group who **really** believe these things...

d. The antichrists and the crux

1 John 2:1-2

1 John 3:16

1 John 4:10-11

1 John 5:6

e. Bringing some more things together

i. A hopefully somewhat illuminating 5 point summary

1. John's purpose is that his readers *as a group* might know that they have eternal life – ie that that they might know that they know the living God
2. John's purpose is that his readers as a group might know that they have eternal life, that they know the living God, *in the face of unsettling claims of a rival group....*
3. *In other words*, John's purpose is that his readers as a group would know that *they* are the true family, and children of God, not their Judaizing opponents.
4. **And** they are the true children of God because they are the ones who *really* bear the marks of the people of God:
  - a. It is Christians who actually walk as though God is light – because we come to the cross for forgiveness
  - b. It is Christians who actually obey the commandments – because we love the brotherhood, and don't stumble (Gentile?) believers
  - c. It is Christians who actually hate the world – because we reject the world's rejection of the Christ
  - d. It is Christians who actually do righteousness / reject 'the sin' - because we believe in Jesus and won't join the lawless rebellion against him
  - e. It is Christians who actually reject false prophecy
5. Supremely, we bear the ultimate marks of God's people
  - a. Faith in God's Son
  - b. Adherence to the **cross**

ii. Revisiting the 'exam certificate'

- Not so much 'am I a genuine Christian', as...
  
- ... am I in the right family?

- And if we're in the family marked by confession of sin, trust in the cross, acceptance of the brotherhood, faith in Jesus and rejection of those who resist him – it's out exam certificate too!

## 5. Revisiting the Structure

### a. The thing we all know, and the problem with the thing we all know

#### i. No structure in 1 John...

“As a piece of epideictic literature, 1 John, not surprisingly, lacks a clear structure. Instead it revisits the same themes over and over, each time amplifying them further.” Kruse.

“There is no agreement on the organization of 1 John. Twofold, threefold, fourfold, fivefold, sixfold, sevenfold, and tenfold divisions have been proposed. Schmid proposes an elevenfold organization...” Yarbrough.

#### ii. But, preaching

#### iii. And, argument

### b. A starter for 10: A tale of 2 halves

#### i. Andy Gemmill and Matthew Jensen

Present	Aorist
1 John 2:1	1 John 2:13c
1 John 2:7	1 John 2:14a
1 John 2:8	1 John 2:14b
1 John 2:12	1 John 2:21
1 John 2:13a	1 John 2:26
1 John 2:13b	1 John 5:13

- The split comes right in the middle of an obvious sore thumb, and where the sore thumb starts repeating itself
- The split comes at the point where there *is* a shift in the argument

1:5-2:11 = general theological principles

2:15ff = application to the specific situation, and the antichrists

ii. Two halves?

1:1-2:11 – General theological foundation

2:12-14 – Pivot

2:15-5:21 – Application to you / the situation

c. Taking things further: a chiasm

i. A pair we've already noticed

2:15-27

4:1-6

ii. A key section in between that that seems to be book-ended

2:28-3:3

*Abiding, confidence, we know, the world doesn't know, the Father's love,  
practicing righteousness*

3:19-24

*Abiding, confidence, we know, God knows, believing in his Son, keeping his  
commandments.*

**Groupwork:**

*Choose one of these two pairs: 1:1-4 and 5:6-12 or 1 John 1:5-2:11 and 4:7-5:5. Can you spot any significant correspondences between your pair? Make a list.*

iii. Two big theological 'wings'

1:5-2:11

"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Propitiation

Liars / perfection / keeping commandments

Faith *then* love

4:7-5:5

"... because God is love."

Propitiation

Liars / perfection / keeping commandments

Love *then* faith

iv. Two testimony sections

The testimony of the apostles and life (1:1-4)

The testimony of God and life (5:6-12)

v. Drawing things together:<sup>7</sup> **The Structure of 1 John**

A. 1:1-4 - The testimony of the apostles ('our' testimony) and life

**B. 1:5-2:11 - God is light and walking in the light**

C. 2:15-27 - The world and the antichrists

**D. 2:28-3:10 - The children of God and the children of the devil**

**D' 3:11-24 - Loving the brotherhood or children of Cain**

C' 4:1-6 - False prophets, false spirits, and the world

**B' 4:7-5:5 - God is love and loving one another**

A' 5:6-21 - The testimony of God, life, and what we know

## 6. Interim report

a. Revisiting our assumptions, and getting back on the right foot

- Purpose
- Situation
- Structure

b. Are we ready to preach?

- ✓ Purpose
- ✓ Situation
- ✓ Message, more or less
- ✓ Style
- ✓ Divisions
- ✓ Key passages, so we could boil it down to a weekend away
- ✓ The makings of a cool powerpoint

*But what we haven't quite got yet is the argument*

## 7. Revisiting the Hospital: The Argument of 1 John

### a. Revisiting Gemmill/Jensen

Theological foundation *then* application to them / situation

le diagnostic *then* diagnosis; exam then exam certificate

***But:*** *is it really the case that 2:15-5:21 is then an undifferentiated whole?*

*And why does John stop telling you that he's writing to reassure you for most of the space between the end of 2 and the beginning of 5?*

### b. A pivot to action

**Groupwork:** Compare the pairs:

1:1-4 with 5:6-21

1:5-2:11 with 4:7-5:5

2:15-27 with 4:1-6

*In each case, which passage is more explicit (in your judgment) in giving John's readers something **to do**? How do you think that might fit with the situation the letter describes? How do you think it might fit with the flow of the letter?*

### c. Action that confirms identity

'By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in the world.'

- d. A three stage, rather than two stage, letter

***Diagnostic***

***Diagnosis (from 2:12)***

***Medicine (from 3:11, but especially after 4:7)***

**OR:**

***Test***

***Results (from 2:12)***

***Homework? (from 3:11, but especially after 4:7)***

- e. Taking you beyond the exam certificate

## Conclusion: Preaching 1 John

- a. The purpose revisited and our preaching
  - a. Not so much reassuring the doubting individual...
  - b. ... as giving confidence that the Christian family is the right one to belong to
- b. The situation revisited and our preaching
- c. The argument and structure and our preaching
  - a. Three main movements in a series

b. Three talks it'd be difficult to do without

- 1 John 1:5-2:11
- 1 John 2:28-3:24 – or at least a chunk of it, and this is hard
- 1 John 4:7-5:5 – or at least a chunk of it

d. My go at this...

<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/series/5047/>